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## AUSTRALIA PREPARES FOR ITS BICENTENARY

This special article has been contributed by the Australian Bicentennial Authority.

Australia's Bicentennial celebrations are being planned as a year-long program recognising all aspects of the nation's life and heritage. A great diversity of projects and events is in preparation at national, state and local levels. The program sets out to involve some 16 million Australians in spectacular events, community based activities and projects that satisfy long-term educational goals as well as providing 'bricks and mortar' projects that will leave lasting and worthwhile memorials.

The Bicentenary commemorates the 200th anniversary of permanent European settlement in Australia. It marks the events of 26 January 1788, when the eleven ships of Captain Arthur Phillip's First Fleet arrived from Britain and gathered in Port Jackson to found the colony of New South Wales.

The 1988 program offers Australians the opportunity to contribute effectively to their own national celebrations and to use the year to extend their range of ideas and experience about what it is to be Australian. The Bicentenary will encourage Australians to develop a unity and common purpose as a nation. It provides an ideal opportunity to focus worldwide attention on Australia in tourist, economic, social and cultural terms.

### **The Australian Bicentennial Authority**

In co-operation with the Governments of the States and the Northern Territory, the Commonwealth Government announced its intention to establish The Australian Bicentennial Authority in April 1979 to co-ordinate a national program of celebrations. The Authority was incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory as a company limited by guarantee with a representative Board of Directors nominated by the Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Governments.

The Authority's task is to plan, co-ordinate and promote the celebrations for the Bicentenary. It is essentially a catalytic role to foster the widest possible participation. The brief includes encouraging involvement in the program by the shareholder governments, local government authorities, community groups, the corporate sector, the public generally and the international community.

At its inception, the Authority faced a daunting task. For a start, there were no precedents, no guidelines. Also, in the early years it was difficult to impress upon the nation the need for long-range planning and early financial commitments.

The problem of how to make the Bicentenary relevant to a nation of such cultural diversity was tackled by asking the people how they wished to commemorate the 200th anniversary.

This was a lengthy process, involving consultations with thousands of Australians through-out the country. The results of these consultations and subsequent commissioned research provided the basis for the principles that have been developed as the foundation for all Bicentennial planning.

Here are the main findings:

1. More than 80 percent of Australians, wherever they live and whatever their ethnic origins, believe it is 'important' or 'very important' to have a major national celebration in the Bicentennial year.
2. Australians believe that, while spectacles are necessary ingredients of celebration, it is important to ensure that the emphasis in the overall Bicentennial program is on wide-ranging educational and cultural pursuits, designed to strengthen national unity and identity. They also assert that much-needed community facilities should be established to remind present and future generations that 1988 was a significant year in the development of modern Australia.
3. Communities everywhere wish to plan their own local celebrations.

Consequently, the Authority moved quickly to decentralise the planning. Bicentennial Councils have been established in each state and territory. As well, a network of Bicentennial Community Committees is being set up in local government areas.

Towards the end of 1985 over 520 of these committees had been formed. The Authority's target is to have a committee in each of the 830 or so local government areas in Australia. The final tally will represent a workforce of tens of thousands of dedicated Australians nationwide, working on local and regional plans for the Bicentenary.

The primary aims of these committees are to develop balanced community celebrations programs reflecting the Bicentennial objectives; to stimulate local interest; and to provide a link with branches of the Authority and the wider Bicentennial network.

In May 1985, the Commonwealth Government announced a \$17.5 million grants program aimed at helping local government authorities around Australia to undertake Bicentennial activities. The scheme was developed by the Australian Bicentennial Authority to involve local communities in the celebrations of 1988.

## **Objectives**

The Authority's planning principles and strategy are based on the following objectives:

1. To celebrate the richness of diversity of Australians, their traditions and the freedoms which they enjoy.
2. To encourage all Australians to understand and preserve their heritage, recognise the multicultural nature of modern Australia, and look to the future with confidence.
3. To ensure that all Australians participate in, or have access to, the activities of 1988, so that

the Bicentenary will be a truly national program in both character and geographic spread.

4. To develop projects and programs which will provide significant and enduring legacies to present-day Australians and future generations.

5. To project Australia to the world and invite international participation with the aim of strengthening relationships with other nations.

The Bicentennial Program provides an opportunity to re-examine Australia's history, spanning more than 40,000 years but with particular emphasis on the past 200 years. It will encourage the Australian people to look at themselves critically and to undergo a process of national self-assessment. But as well as this re-appraisal of the nation's past, the program will focus on the present and future—on Australia today, its place in the world and options for tomorrow.

The development of a theme for the Bicentennial program was one of the Authority's earliest priorities. 'Living Together' was chosen as a reflection of co-operative effort by every Australian, irrespective of background. It is a forward-looking theme that describes an ongoing process and refers to a program yet uncompleted.

## **Projects and Events**

One of the major components of the National Program being co-ordinated by the Australian Bicentennial Authority is the Commonwealth/State Bicentennial Commemorative Program. Under this scheme, the Commonwealth Government has made a total of \$48 million available on a matched funding basis to State and Territory Governments for Bicentennial capital works that will be of a lasting nature; appropriate to the Bicentenary; completed or in place by 31 December 1988; and useable by or available to a broad cross-section of the community.

The program comprises some thirty projects, including the Newcastle Harbourside Park, which is a foreshore beautification scheme to regenerate 15 hectares of the seaport city's industrial frontage; the Melbourne Waterways Program, designed to clean up, beautify and restore some of Melbourne's creeks and rivers, particularly in the western and inner suburbs; the Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame in Longreach, Queensland, developed in honour of the pioneers who opened up the interior of Australia; establishment of a marine park around the Ningaloo reef on Western Australia's central west coast to preserve part of over 250 kilometres of coral reef and its adjacent shores; and an Outback Interpretive Centre at Port Augusta in South Australia.

The Australian Bicentennial Exhibition is the largest single activity being undertaken by the Authority as part of its National Program. It will be an innovative travelling display examining Australia's past, present and future. The giant touring show will be on the road from mid 1987 and over a period of 18 months will travel the length and breadth of the country, visiting about 47 cities and towns.

Following a national competition, the architectural firm, Daryl Jackson Pty Ltd., was appointed to design the mobile venue for the exhibition. The Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction has responsibility for overseeing the design and structural phases.

The Exhibition will explore the changing nature of relationships between people, and with the environment; the development of an Australian identity; Australian achievements; and directions for the future.

Tall Ships Australia 1988 will be one of the most spectacular events of the Bicentennial year. Vessels taking part will gather in Hobart and then race to Sydney, arriving from 19 January 1988

onwards. They will depart Sydney in a Parade of Sail on 26 January.

A number of square riggers approaching across the Indian Ocean will be invited to call at Fremantle, Albany, Port Lincoln, Adelaide and Melbourne before arriving in Hobart. Those ships approaching across the Pacific Ocean will be invited to call at Brisbane, Melbourne or Launceston.

The race from Hobart to Sydney is being planned as an international Tall Ships Race conducted by the Authority in association with the Sail Training Association (U.K.).

Invitations have been extended by the Australian Government to 30 countries which own or operate sail training vessels. It is expected that vessels will attend from Spain, the United States, Japan, the Federal Republic of Germany, Poland, the USSR, Brazil and New Zealand. There are also encouraging signs that vessels from the United Kingdom, Norway, Portugal, India and Columbia will be among the acceptances. Invitations have been sent by the Authority to a further 250 non-government owned vessels from overseas.

Planning Committees have been set up in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, Victoria and Queensland to prepare a welcome for the ships and their crews. The visiting trainees will be entertained by young Australians and given an opportunity to experience life in this country.

After the grand Parade of Sail vessels will return to their home ports, or, if time permits, they will be encouraged to visit other Australian ports.

The Bicentennial Science Centre is proposed as a major commemorative project.

The Centre, which is to be built in Canberra, will adopt the 'hands-on' approach to help people to understand the discoveries and developments in science and technology. An information and extension service will be established to give Australians in all states and territories access to the centre's resources, and an exchange of exhibits with scientific institutions in each state and territory will be arranged.

The National Program for 1988 places considerable emphasis on education and information activities to encourage Australians to discover more about themselves, their past, their country and the possibilities for the future.

Development of community events provides for education projects and schools involvement; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation; multicultural events; an interfaith program of activities involving the major faiths and denominations; and programs to foster involvement by older Australians, people with disabilities; unions, youth, and women.

A wide-ranging program of special Bicentennial events features national and international activities such as a Military Tattoo that will tour all states, the Bicentennial Air Show, an around Australia air race, an across Australia balloon challenge and Bicentennial barnstorming with vintage aircraft; spectacular opening and closing ceremonies; a major naval review; funding for community-originated environmental and heritage projects; and commissioning of documentaries and cinema shorts. A series of publications to be produced for the Bicentenary includes the 'Encyclopaedia of the Australian People', which is being developed by the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University. It will document the diverse origins and ways of life of Aboriginal Australians, Torres Strait Islanders and the different cultural groups that have settled this country in successive waves of immigration.

A Futures Project is being developed to encourage all Australians to use the Bicentenary to focus on their aspirations for the future. The Project will revolve around the publication and dissemination of a comprehensive series of issues papers which will be used in connection with

consultations, workshops and conferences at the local, regional and national level.

The Bicentennial Sport and Recreation Program will present an extensive range of national, international and special events in such areas as track and field, tennis, hockey, football, cricket, sailing, golf, skiing and motor-racing.

The Arts and Entertainment Program being developed for 1988 will see Australian tours by some of the world's leading artists and performing groups in 1988. As well, some of Australia's best artists, Australian dance and theatre companies and musicians will have a chance to perform on the world stage. There is an extensive commissionings program to encourage the creation of new and exciting works across the entire arts spectrum.

The Commonwealth-funded National Program will be complemented by other Australian Government initiatives, including the new Parliament House in Canberra, the national Bicentennial Road Development Program and development of the Australia Telescope in New South Wales.

The Australian Government's financial commitment also gives an important lead to other spheres of government.

As well as hosting Expo 88, and commitment of funds to a number of major projects under the Joint Commonwealth/State Commemorative Program, the Queensland Government is also supporting a state program of celebrations which will include some special projects, as well as funds to assist the involvement of every local government authority in the state.

The New South Wales Government is allocating funds for a State Bicentennial Program. This is expected to include per capita grants to local government areas, similar to the scheme operating under the National Program.

The state is also undertaking some large-scale capital works, including the redevelopment of Sydney's Darling Harbour as a venue for conferences, exhibitions, trade fairs and public recreation.

Other state/territory governments have announced Bicentennial funding programs or are expected to announce them in the near future.

## **Corporate Involvement**

The Authority is addressing the question of corporate-sector involvement. Companies can become involved in several ways. For example, they may wish to enter into joint ventures with the Authority to give financial support to the program of national and international activities; they can develop and fund their own activities; or they can become suppliers of services.

## **International Involvement**

Foreign governments are beginning to address the question of their participation in the Bicentenary.

The Washington-based American-Australian Bicentennial Foundation has been set up by the United States Government and the British Government has established a high-level committee to mastermind the United Kingdom's involvement. Other countries which now have special committees working on plans for Australia's Bicentenary are the Federal Republic of Germany, France, the Netherlands, New Zealand and Japan.

## Australia on show

The Bicentenary presents a unique opportunity for Australia to take centre stage internationally in 1988.

Opportunities for tourism are very significant. Already, more than 200 major international and national gatherings have been arranged for 1988. They will involve young people, voluntary organisations, sporting groups, professional associations and societies.

In its well advanced planning for 1988 The Australian Bicentennial Authority has put the framework in place for a celebrations program that will reflect the interests and priorities of the Australian people, and provide lasting benefits to the nation.

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